

## BRIEF HISTORY OF EARLY LEARNING IN WASHINGTON

The following time line highlights federal and state legislation and initiatives impacting early learning in Washington State over the years.

### 1965

The first federally funded **Head Start** programs opened throughout the United States in 1965. Head Start provides comprehensive education, health, nutrition, and parent involvement services to low-income children and their families. Eighty percent of Head Start funding is federal and 20 percent is a required local match. In 2010, there were 9,702 children enrolled in Head Start in Washington at an average cost of \$9,084 per child. The federal government administers the Head Start program and directly contracts with providers.

### 1977

Article IX, Section 1 of the State Constitution declares that it is the paramount duty of the state to make ample provision for the education of the state's children. In response to a superior court ruling that directed the state to define and fund a **program of Basic Education**, the Legislature adopted the Basic Education Act of 1977. The Act required that the Basic Education program include several programs, including 180 half-days of instruction (at least 450 hours) in kindergarten. (See all-day kindergarten developments in 2007, 2009, and 2010.)

### 1985

The Washington State Legislature established the **Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)**, which is Washington's state-funded preschool. ECEAP is specifically excluded from the program of Basic Education. The Legislature first provided \$2.9 million to serve approximately 1,000 children statewide in fiscal year 1987. ECEAP is a comprehensive whole child, family-focused, preschool program designed to help low-income and at-risk children and their families succeed in school and life. The program was modeled after Head Start. In 2010, there were 8,053 ECEAP slots funded at \$6,662 per child. As of November 30, 2010, 1,837 4-year-olds and 2,497 3-year-olds are on the wait list, statewide. The Department of Early Learning (DEL) administers ECEAP and directly contracts with service providers.

### 1989

The Legislature directed DSHS to organize local child care resource and referral organizations into a statewide system. The **Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) Network** is charged with helping parents find child care; educating parents, providers, and the community about quality child care; supporting providers through training and technical assistance; and collecting data about child care supply and demand in Washington State. In the 2009-11 biennium the Legislature appropriated \$1.48 million (\$638,000 GF-S and \$850,000 GF-F) to the CCRR Network. The Governor is proposing \$1.276 million GF-S for the 2011-13 budget.

## 1998

Governor Gary Locke created the Commission on Early Learning to focus public attention on the learning of Washington's youngest children. The Commission created a statewide, public engagement campaign about the importance of early brain development and established a nonprofit foundation, the **Foundation for Early Learning**. Today, the Foundation works with partners across the state to support high-quality early learning, child care, and preschool by providing grants, free publications, and online services to parents and caregivers.

## 2005

The Legislature created **Washington Learns** to conduct a comprehensive review of the state's entire education system, from early learning through K-12 and post-secondary education, and to issue final recommendations by November 2006. The Washington Learns Steering Committee was chaired by Governor Gregoire. As directed by the Legislature, three advisory committees reported to the Steering Committee.

The Legislature also created the **Washington Early Learning Council (ELC)** in the Office of the Governor to pull together previously disparate early learning programs and services and to help create a coherent, high quality early learning system for children from birth to five years. The ELC served as the early learning advisory body for Washington Learns. Among other things, the ELC recommended that a cabinet-level Department of Early Learning be created as well as public-private partnerships focused on engaging the public and improving the quality of early learning. The act authorizing ELC expired July 1, 2007.

## 2006

As a result of one of the recommendations of Washington Learns, the Legislature established the **Department of Early Learning (DEL)** as an executive branch agency. The primary duties of DEL are to implement early learning policy and to coordinate, consolidate, and integrate child care and early learning programs in order to administer programs and funds efficiently. As part of this broad mandate the Legislature transferred the administration or regulation of early learning and child programs from the Department of Social & Health Services (DSHS), the Department of Community Trade & Economic Development (CTED), and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). Thus, DEL oversees and regulates child care licensing, administers ECEAP, home visiting programs, and the Early Support for Infants & Toddlers (ESIT) program for children birth to three with disabilities.

The Legislature created a nongovernmental private-public partnership to focus on supporting the government's investments in early learning and ensuring that every child in the state is prepared to succeed in school and in life. This partnership is known as **Thrive by Five Washington**.

By September 1, 2009, every school district is required provide or contract for **early intervention services** to all eligible children with disabilities from birth to age 3. Eligibility is determined according to Part C of the federal Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The services are not part of Basic Education. (IDEA, Part B, is available to all children with disabilities between the ages of 3 and 21. Special education programs for students with disabilities have included students of preschool age for over 50 years.)

## 2007

The Legislature established the **Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC)** to advise DEL on statewide early learning needs and to develop a statewide early learning plan. Twenty-three members are specified in statute. ELAC must include diverse, statewide representation from public, nonprofit, and for-profit entities. Council members serve two-year terms. DEL provides staff support.

The Legislature directed the Department of Early Learning (DEL) to design and implement a voluntary **quality rating and improvement system (QRIS)**. A QRIS awards quality ratings to early care and education programs that meet a set of defined program standards. Seeds to Success, Washington's QRIS model, may be applied to licensed or certified child care centers and homes and early education programs. The purpose of QRIS is to (1) give parents clear and easily accessible information about the quality of child care and early education programs, (2) support statewide improvement in early learning programs, (3) increase the readiness of children for school, and (4) close the disparity in access to quality care. The Legislature provided DEL \$4.75 million in the 2007-09 budget to develop and pilot QRIS. DEL and Thrive by Five are conducting field tests on elements of Seeds to Success in five communities: Clark County, Spokane County, Kitsap County, White Center, and East Yakima.

## 2007 & 2009 & 2010

As a result of another recommendation of Washington Learns, the Legislature directed that beginning in the 2007-08 school year voluntary **all-day kindergarten** will be phased in, beginning with schools with the highest poverty levels. Schools receiving funding for all-day kindergarten have to agree to program requirements, including providing at least 1,000 hours of instruction, providing a rich curriculum, and having connections with community early learning programs and parents.

In 2007 all-day kindergarten was specifically placed outside the definition of Basic Education. However, in 2009 the Legislature redefined the minimum instructional program of Basic Education to include 180 days of half-day kindergarten, to be phased in to 180 days of all-day kindergarten. In 2010 the Legislature directed that funding to implement all-day kindergarten must be phased in incrementally until full statewide implementation is achieved in the 2017-18 school year.

## 2010

The Legislature established a **technical working group** to develop a comprehensive plan for a voluntary program of early learning. The working group is convened by OSPI and DEL, but monitored and overseen by Quality Education Council. The plan must examine the opportunities and barriers of at least two options: (1) a program of early learning under Basic

Education, and (2) a program of early learning as an entitlement. A final report and plan due November 1, 2011. For more information, see <http://www.del.wa.gov/government/legislature/voluntary.aspx>.

The Legislature adopted the **Ready for School Act of 2010**, which establishes a voluntary program of early learning for three- and four-year olds. The program must be implemented beginning September 1, 2011, and requires that the program use ECEAP program and eligibility standards. The funding for the program in the 2011-13 biennium must not be less than the funding provided for ECEAP in the 2009-11 biennium. Additional funding must be phased in until the program is fully implemented by the 2018-19 school year, when any eligible child is entitled to enroll in the program. (Note: the Governor's 2011-13 budget cuts \$9 million from ECEAP, which would require legislation to amend the Ready for School Act of 2010.)

DEL, OSPI, and Thrive by Five released the **Washington State Early Learning Plan (ELP)** in September. It is a strategic 10-year roadmap to build a comprehensive, coordinated, effective, measurable, and accessible early learning system in Washington, addressing children's needs and well-being from prenatal through third-grade. Back in 2007, the Legislature directed ELAC to work with DEL to develop a statewide early learning plan that guides the department in promoting alignment of private and public sector actions, objectives, and resources, and ensuring school readiness. The Plan is available at <http://www.del.wa.gov/publications/elac-qr/docs/ELP.pdf>.